



No sooner were Liberace and I in his bed without our clothes than I realised how stupid I had been. At this distance I can naturally not remember every little detail, but if there is one musical form that I hate more than any other, it is the medley. One minute the musician, or more likely aged band, is playing an overorchestrated version of The Impossible Dream; all of a sudden, mid-verse, for no reason, there's a stomach-turning swerve into another key and you're in the middle of Over the Rainbow, swerve, climb Every Mountain, swerve, Ain't No Mountain High Enough, swerve, swerve, Well then, you have only to imagine Liberace, hands, mouth, penis now here, now there, no sooner here than there, no sooner there than here again, starting something only to stop and start something else instead, and you will have a pretty accurate picture of the Drunken Medley.

The Medley came at last to an end and Liberace fell into a deep sleep.

I wanted to clear my head. I wanted strangeness and coldness and precision.

I listened for a little while to Glenn Gould playing pieces from The Well-Tempered Clavier. In recording sessions Gould would often make nine or ten different versions of a piece, each note perfect, each perfectly distinct from the others in character, and each note played bears the mark of all those to which it was preferred. I am not really capable of replaying a fugue in my head so I listened to his queer performance of the C minor prelude, Book 1, which begins with each note staccato, and then two-thirds of the way down the first page the notes suddenly run very smoothly and softly, and then I listened to Prelude No. 22 in B flat minor which I could never play without the pedal. I think that though perhaps it should not be played with the pedal it should at least be played legato, and yet the

harsh abruptness with which Gould plays this piece displaced with its coldness, its lack of ease, the wilful expressiveness with which Lib-
erace wearies the heart.

Liberace was still asleep. His head lay on the pillow, face as I had seen it, skull encasing a sleeping brain; how cruel that we must wake each time to answer to the same name, revive the same memories, take up the same habits and stupidities that we shouldered the day before and lay down to sleep. I did not want to watch him wake to go on as he had begun.

I did not want to be there when he woke up but it would be rude to leave without a word. On the other hand almost any note would be impossible to write. I could not say thank you for a lovely evening because you can't. I could not say hope to see you again because what if he took this as encouragement to see me again? I could not say I had a horrible time and I hope I never see you again because you just can't. If I tried to write a short note that said something without saying any of these things I would still be there five or six hours later when he woke up.

Then I had an idea.

The thing to do, I thought, was to *imply* that we had had an interesting conversation which just happened to be interrupted by the fact that I had to leave (for some sort of appointment, for example). Instead of marking the close of the occasion the note should present itself as a further element of a conversation which was still in progress & only suspended. The note should appear to assume that Liberace was interested in things like the Rosetta Stone & should purport to answer a perceived scepticism as to the possibility of putting together such a thing in such a way as to be generally comprehensible, thus presenting itself as part of an ongoing discussion to be resumed at some unspecified later date. All I would have to do was write down a short passage of Greek, as if for this interested sceptic, with translation transliteration vocabulary and grammatical comments—taking pains,

of course, to write the latter as if for the type of person who can't get enough of things like the middle voice, dual number, aorist and tmesis. I am usually not very good at dealing with social dilemmas, but this seemed a stroke of genius. It would take about an hour (comparing favourably with the five-hour unwritable note), and the final tissue of false implication would practically guarantee (while avoiding gratuitous cruelty and yet not departing for one instant from the truth) that Liberace would never want to see me again.

I got up and got dressed and I went into the next room and got a piece of paper from his desk. Then I took my Edding 0.1 pen from my bag, because I was going to try to fit it all on one page, and I sat down and got to work. It was about 3:00 a.m.

You seemed to doubt that a Rosetta Stone would be possible (I began casually). What do you think of this?

Iliad 17, Zeus pities the horses of Achilles mourning the death of Patroclus

Μυρομένω δ' ἄρα τῷ γε ἰδὼν ἐλέησε Κρονίων,	Seeing them grieving the son of Kronos took pity
<i>muromenō d' ara tō ge idōn eleēse Kroniōn</i>	
κινήσας δὲ κάρη προτὶ ὄν μυθήσατο θυμόν·	And moving his head spoke his mind
<i>kinēsas de karē protī hon muthēsato thumon</i>	
ἃ δειλῶ, τί σφῶι δόμεν Πηληϊΐ ἀνακτί	'Ah wretched things, why did we give you to King Peleus,
<i>a deilō, ti sphōi domen Pēlēi anakti</i>	
θνητῶ, ὅμεις δ' ἐστὼν ἀγήρῳ τ' ἀθανάτῳ τε;	A mortal, when you are ageless and deathless?
<i>thnētōi, humeis d' eston agērō t' athanatō te</i>	
ἢ ἵνα δυστήνοισι μετ' ἀνδράσιν ἄλγε' ἐχῆτον;	Was it that you might have sorrows with wretched men?
<i>ē hina dustēnoisi met' andrasin alge' ekhēton</i>	
οὐ μὲν γάρ τί πού ἐστιν οἰζυρότερον ἀνδρός	For there is nothing more wretched than man
<i>ou men gar ti pou estin oizurōteron andros</i>	
πάντων ὅσσα τε γαῖαν ἔπι πνεῖει τε καὶ ἔρπει.	Of all things that breathe and creep upon the earth.
<i>pantōn hossa te gaian epī pneiei te kai herpei</i>	
ἀλλ' οὐ μὰν ὕμιν γε καὶ ἄρμασι δαιδαλέοισιν	But not by you and the glittering chariot will
<i>all' ou man humin ge kai harmasi daidaleoisin</i>	
Ἑκτωρ Πριαμίδης ἐποχῆσεται· οὐ γὰρ ἐάσω.	Hector son of Priam be carried; for I will not allow it.
<i>Hektōr Priamidēs epokhēsetai ou gar easō.</i>	

So far so good. It was only 3:15, and here already was more help for the decipherer than the Rosetta Stone ever gave Champollion. In fact I could not help thinking how much easier life would be if I proceeded without further ado to a noncommittal Ciao, rather than struggling hungover and sleepless with grammatical detail. And yet the text as it stood looked so thin. Apart from the transliteration, it offered nothing not readily available in the pages of the Loeb Classical Library. It was completely unconvincing as a message in a bottle and besides, it would be only too obvious that it could not have taken more than 15 minutes to write. So it would still be necessary to leave a note unless, of course, I left a more plausible sample of the gift to posterity, and I wrote

Μυρομένω grieving [masculine/feminine accusative dual middle participle]

δ' ἄρα and then, and so [connective particles] **τῷ** them [M/F accusative

dual pronoun] **γε** emphatic particle **ιδῶν** seeing [M. nominative singular

aorist participle] **ἔλεησε** took pity [3rd person singular aorist indicative]

Κρονίων the son of Kronos (Zeus)

and I still did not have something on the page that could be concluded with an airy Ciao.

It was also useless as a message in a bottle because full of unexplained grammatical terms which should really be explained or taken out. But I could not take them out without writing it all out again, and I could not explain them without going on for pages. But what if I had got carried away going through the passage word by word and not noticed this problem till later?

κινῆσας moving [masculine nominative singular aorist participle] δε and
 [connective particle] κἀρη head πορτ . . . λυθησάτο addressed
 [3rd person singular aorist middle indicative] οὐ his θυμὸν soul/spirit/
 mind/heart [masculine accusative singular]
 ὃ Ἀχ δεῖλῶς wretched [masculine/feminine vocative dual] τί why σφῶν you
 [2nd person accusative dual] δόμην did we give [1st person plural aorist
 indicative] Πηληΐδῃ Pelus (father of Achilles) ἀνακτι king [masculine dative
 singular 3rd declension]
 θνητῷ mortal [masc. dative sing. 2nd declension] ὑμεῖς you [2nd person nomi-
 native plural] δ' [connective particle] but, yet ἐστὼν you are [2nd person
 dual indicative] ἀγήρω ageless [M/F nominative dual] τ' . . . τε
 both...and ἀθανάτῳ immortal [M/F nom. dual]
 ἦ forsooth [exclamatory particle] ἴνα so that θυστήνοισι wretched [M. dative
 plural] ἡτ' with ἀνδράσιν men [M. dative plural] ἀλγέ' [= algea] pains,
 sorrows [neuter accusative plural] ἐχῆντο you should have [2nd person dual
 subjunctive]
 οὐ not μὲν introductory particle γὰρ for τί anything [neuter nominative sin-
 gular] ποῦ anywhere ἐστίν is [3rd person singular present indicative]
 οἷς ὑπὸ πῶτον more miserable/wretched [neuter nom. sing. comparative]
 ἀνδρὸς than man [M. genitive singular after comparative adjective]
 πᾶντων of all things [neuter genitive plural] ὅσα as many things [neuter
 nominative plural] τε particle showing generalisation γαῖαν earth [fem.
 accusative singular] ἐπὶ upon [here postpositive] πνεῖσι breathe [3rd person
 singular present indicative dependent on neuter plural noun] τε καὶ both and
 ἔρπει creep [3rd person sing. pres. indicative]
 ἀλλ' but οὐ not μὲν emphatic particle ὑμῖν by you [2nd p. dative plural]
 γε emphatic particle καὶ and ἀρμασιν chariot [neuter dative plural]
 βαλὰλῶσιν glittering, cunningly made [neuter dative plural]
 Ἔκτωρ Hector Πριάμῳ son of Priam ἐποχῆσθαι will be carried [3rd
 p. singular future passive indicative] οὐ not γὰρ for ἔδωκ I will allow [1st
 p. singular future active indicative]

It seemed to be rather longer than I had expected.
 It had also taken a bit longer to write than I had expected (two hours). This still compared favourably with a five-hour unwritable note. I wrote a final paragraph pointing out that for a real Rosetta Stone you would probably want to have a third column with Chinese but unfortunately I did not know any of the characters, and then I said that if he had ever come across the poem of Keats on looking into Chapman's Homer he would probably be interested and surprised to see that this was what Chapman had written:

De dummy dummy dum Iove saw their heavy chear,
 And (pitying them) spake to his minde; Poor wretched beasts
 (said he)
 Why gave we you t'a mortall king? De dummy dummy dum
 De dummy dummy dum de dummy dummy dum?
 De dummy dummy dum de dummy dummy dum?
 Of all the miserablest things that breathe and crepe on earth,
 No one more wretched is then man. And for your deathless
 birth,
 Hector must faile to make you prise de dummy dummy dum

and then I just said you see how easy it would be I hope you like it
 Must dash—S and after the S I put an illegible dashing scrawl be-
 cause I thought there was a good chance he had not caught my name
 the night before.
 Then I put this on a table where he would be bound to see it. It
 had seemed so plausible and suave when I had had the idea in bed,
 and yet now I wondered whether Liberate would realise that I was
 politely implying etc. etc. or whether it just looked outre. Too late,
 and so good-bye.

I got home and I thought I should stop leading so aimless an existence. It is harder than you might think to stop leading an existence, & if you can't do that the only thing you can do is try to introduce an element of purposefulness.

Whether Liberate liked the Horses of Achilles I do not know (going by his other remarks it would not surprise me to learn that he felt like Cortez gazing on the Pacific on reading the Chapman). It had made me happy to write down the passage, anyway, & I thought that I could now do this for the whole *Iliad* and *Odyssey* with interleaved pages explaining various features of grammar and dialect and formulaic composition. I could print them up for a few thousand pounds and sell them at a market stall and people would be able to read them regardless of whether they had studied French or Latin or some other irrelevant subject at school. Then I could do something similar for other languages which are even harder to study at school than Greek, and though I might have to wait another 30 or 40 years for my body to join the non-sentient things in the world at least in the meantime it would be a less absolutely senseless sentence. OK.

One day Emma invited me into her office for a talk. She explained that she would be leaving the company. What would I do? If her job disappeared, so would mine. I hadn't been with the firm long enough to be entitled to maternity pay. Was I planning to go back to the States to have the baby?

I did not know what to say.

I didn't say anything, and Emma made practical suggestions. She said the publisher was launching a project into 20th-century language which involved typing and tagging magazine text for computer; she said she had made inquiries, and thought she could get me smuggled onto this under my work permit. She said there would be no problem about taking the computer to work from the home since the office had been downsized out of existence. She said that she knew of

a house whose owner could not afford to fix it and who was afraid it would be occupied by squatters if she did not rent it; she said that the owner would let me have it for £150 a month if I did not ask her to fix it. I did not know what to say. She said she would understand if I wanted to go back to the States to be with my family. I knew what not to say: I did not say no one could understand that, for I would have to be mad to do it. I said: Thank you very much.